

Meridian

Virtuoso Double Bass - Giovanni Bottesini 1821-1889 Vol. 2
Leon Bosch - Double Bass Sung-Suk Kang - Piano

CDE 84587

Meridian

A Natural Sound Recording

CDE 84587

TT 69'14"



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Recorded by Richard Hughes
Produced by Susanne Hughes
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Piano - Bosendorfer
provided by Markson Pianos

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Virtuoso Double Bass

Giovanni Bottesini 1821-1889 Vol. 2

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|--|-------|
| [1] Sérénade du Barbier de Séville (Rossini) | 1:23 |
| [2] Air d'Il Trovatore (Verdi) | 2:27 |
| [3] Final de la Somnanbule (Bellini) | 2:03 |
| [4] Fantasia sulla "Norma di Bellini" | 10:00 |
| [5] Fantasia Cerrito | 10:27 |
| [6] "Nel cor più non mi sento"
(Variations on a Theme of Paisiello) | 4:56 |
| [7] Melodia No.4 "Auld Robin Gray" | 3:54 |
| [8] Fantasia sur Beatrice di tenda | 10:41 |
| [9] Melodia No.2 | 5:41 |
| [10] Romance de L'Elisire D'Amore (Donizetti) | 3:09 |
| [11] Fantasia Lucia di Lammermoor | 9:21 |
| [12] Nocturne | 5:12 |

Leon Bosch - Double Bass
Sung-Suk Kang - Piano

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Virtuoso Double Bass

Giovanni Bottesini
1821-1889

Leon Bosch - Double Bass
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Vol. 2



The working relationship between Sung-Suk Kang and the distinguished double bass player Leon Bosch goes back to 1982, when both were students at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, UK. Sung-Suk accompanied Leon during lessons and at scholarship auditions.

'At the end of our courses of study,' Leon remembers, 'the RNCM principal, Sir John Manduell, invited us to play two pieces together in one of the so-called principal's concerts. These were showcase events in which his 'prize students' were afforded a platform to perform in front of an audience of many distinguished invited guests, as well as the public. Sung-Suk and I performed two pieces by the great double bass player Bottesini, the *Capriccio di Bravura* and *Fantasy Sonnambula*.

'I'll remember that 1984 concert forever, for Sung-Suk's magical playing throughout. There was one extended piano *tutti* in *Sonnambula* which was particular memorable for its unique delicacy and scintillating effervescence.' Sung-Suk picks up the story. 'After we left the RNCM, Leon and I lost contact with each other for twenty years. Then in the autumn of 2006, all of a sudden I received an SMS message from Leon on my mobile.....out of the blue. I called him back and discovered that at short notice he wanted me to play for him on a CD of pieces by Bottesini. After exchanging a few emails, I agreed.'

So what had inspired Leon to make the move? 'After Sung-Suk and I parted company back in 1984 I always thought of her whenever I played *Sonnambula*. I often wondered what had happened to her. I have a tape recording of that principal's concert and played it often over the years to reassure myself that it was indeed real and not just a grossly exaggerated and romanticised memory!

'Then when I was scheduled to record my first Bottesini disc, my pianist had to withdraw. After much thought, I resolved to try and find Sung-Suk, since she was the only person I felt I'd really be happy to work with. I put her name into *Google* and found her referred to on the website of the conductor, Nayden Todorov. With that lead, I traced her to Vienna.'

'We began to rehearse *as soon as* I arrived in London!' Sung-Suk recalls. 'There wasn't enough time to work on each piece in detail.... and we only had one and a half days to record all the repertoire for the CD.

'Playing with Leon wasn't easy at first - he has a unique way of phrasing and his rubato is never predictable. And of course my ears had to concentrate so much on picking up the thick, deep lower register of the double bass sound. But during the recording sessions everything clicked and became completely natural.

'We tried to create a new atmosphere for each piece and then find the inspiration for a special interpretation at the end of the process. This was always different from what we'd prepared....music-making with Leon is always spontaneous! I love the full sound he makes, all the different colours he creates to express varied emotions in depth.'



'From the first note we played together, there was no doubt in my mind that everything was going to be just fine,' adds Leon. 'We've now recorded five CDs, with more to come. With each successive recording our partnership develops in a way I couldn't have imagined. Sung-Suk's qualities as a musician complement mine in an extraordinary manner. Working with her allows me to live the utopian musical ideal, which would otherwise remain locked in my imagination.'

'Sung-Suk possesses not only consummate technical control, but an extremely highly developed aesthetic sense. She instinctively understands my own brand of musicianship. We seldom have to talk about what we're going to do, how we're going to phrase or anything else.....we just play and challenge each other through the unspoken language of the music itself. No other pianist I've worked with knows, before I've done it, what I'm about to do with a particular phrase or even a single note. She responds in a manner which is the closest thing to perfection, even though that's of course an elusive concept. It really is a privilege and joy to work with her.'

'First and foremost, Leon and I are friends,' says Sung-Suk. 'That's so important: when one of us suggests a musical idea or 'criticises' the other's way of playing and phrasing, it doesn't affect us. We're always ready and happy to hear the other's opinions and suggestions. I couldn't wish for a better duo partner.'

Andrew Green

Like Paganini himself, “the Paganini of the double bass” as Giovanni Bottesini was known to his admiring contemporaries - was a musician interested in far more than demonstrating his phenomenal mastery of his chosen instrument. Like Paganini again, he was in demand everywhere as a virtuoso and achieved immense fame - though without, unlike his violinist counterpart, attracting the reputation of being in league with supernatural forces: it is difficult, after all, to imagine the devil choosing to associate himself with the double bass. Bottesini's life might not have been so colourful as to inspire an operatic equivalent to Lehár's *Paganini* but, even better, between 1848 and 1880 he wrote ten operas himself, often with considerable success.

In fact, Bottesini loved opera as much as he loved the double bass. He devoted much of his life to the instrument, beginning at the age of 14 when, more less by chance, he became a pupil of Luigi Rossi at the Milan Conservatoire. While developing double-bass technique and extending its range to hitherto unimagined heights, however, he was ambitious in pursuing an operatic career. That much is clear not only from his industry as an opera composer but also from the official positions he held, including musical directorships at the Italian Opera in Paris, at the Real Teatro Bellini in Palermo, at the Lyceum Theatre in London and at similar institutions in Spain and Portugal. Verdi, a long-term friend, was so convinced of Bottesini's taste and authority in this respect that he invited him to conduct the first performance of *Aida* in Cairo in 1871.

Another indication of Bottesini's love of opera is that a significant proportion of the music he wrote for double bass was inspired by his experiences in the opera house. On this CD, for example, eight out of a total of twelve items have their origins in opera in one way or another. He was not alone of course in producing

operatic arrangements and fantasias. Everyone was doing it, from the most exalted like Franz Liszt to the merest street musician. He often did it in his own way, however.

Some of Bottesini's arrangements are little different, apart from the fact that they feature the double bass, from the general run of these things. Of the three opera arrangements at the beginning of this programme, two of them, *Sérénade du Barbier de Séville* and *Air d'Il Trovatore* (as Bottesini's linguistically confused titles identify them) are free transcriptions of famous arias respectively “Se il mio nome” from Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and “Il Balen” from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. The Donizetti *Romance*, which comes later in the programme, is another free transcription, in this case of “Una furtiva lagrima” from *L'Elisir d'amore*.

Final de La Sonnambule on the other hand, takes little more than a phrase, Amina's “D'un pensiero e d'un accento” from the finale to the first act of *La Sonnambula* and develops it as though feeling that Bellini had given it too little prominence before having it swallowed up by the following ensemble. This is not so much an arrangement as an improvisation scaling a height which, like that in the cadenza of the Verdi arrangement, can be approached on the double bass only by way of perilous harmonics.

When he conducted opera Bottesini would frequently appear on stage in one of the intervals to deliver a solo on his much-prized three-string Testore double bass. That was probably the origin of his opera fantasias based on works like Bellini's *Norma* or Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* - featuring favourite arias and other notable episodes. At best they are worked into a coherent single-movement construction but not necessarily in the order in which they appear in the opera.

Any *Norma* fantasia would have to include the heroine's great first-act aria "Casta Diva," as Bottesini's does at a suitably late stage in the work, miraculously transforming the double bass into a bel canto singer. The fantasia opens, however, with a piano version of the orchestral introduction to the second act and continues, on the entry of the double bass, with Norma's poignant arioso "Teneri, teneri figli." It ends with the march-like chorus "Dell'aura tua profetica" which, although it precedes Norma's first appearance in the opera, is combined here with a purposeful coda leading up to the closing bars.

Similarly, no treatment of Bellini's *Beatrice di Tenda* could omit Orombello's "Angiol del pace." Bottesini introduces it in double-bass harmonics towards the end of a fantasia that begins and ends in march mode and consists entirely, though with no lack of expressive variety, of music in 4/4.

Perhaps the most sensational of the opera fantasias is the one on *Lucia di Lammermoor* which opens on piano in the storm at the beginning of the third act and at an early stage involves the double bass in dramatic recitative heightened by wide-ranging cadenzas. In fact, it is called upon to perform imposing cadenzas throughout, not least after its second presentation of "Fur le nozze a lei funeste," a last-act chorus to which, alongside more lyrical numbers, Bottesini gives unexpected prominence.

Another indication of Bottesini's affection for opera is that by far the most of his melodic decorations and cadenzas are vocal in style and are derived in many cases from bel canto composers like Bellini. When Bottesini and the double bass take on Paganini and the violin on their own virtuoso ground the difference is plain: *Nel cor più non mi sento*, a set of three variations on the aria of that name from Paisiello's opera *La Molinara*, is a display of instrumental rather than vocal bravura. While some of the figuration would not

be beyond the scope of an accomplished singer, techniques like the bariolage in the coda following the last variation are exclusive to string instruments.

The *Fantasia Cerrito* has nothing to do with opera. It is a tribute, originally scored with orchestral accompaniment, to one of the most famous ballerinas of the day, Fanny Cerrito. If we didn't know that Bottesini was infatuated with her, it would be clear enough from the music itself. She gets an extraordinarily dramatic introduction which would be even more impressive with the orchestral colours that the piano tremolandos can only hint at. The *Andante* section which follows introduces a passionate and elaborately decorated melody in the minor and a more tender though no less intricately articulated one in the major. The quicker closing section is based on a tune which, after its introduction by the piano, inspires the double bass to perform leaps and pirouettes of a complexity and brilliance which any ballet dancer would be proud of.

While there was nothing at all unusual about Bottesini's devotion to opera and ballet, an interest in chamber music was rare among 19th-century Italian composers. He wrote not only a string quintet with double bass but also as many as 11 string quartets in which, of course, there is no part for his instrument. They might well be recorded on future Bottesini issues.

In the meantime, the nearest approach to chamber music here is in the two *Melodia* pieces and the Nocturne. *Melodia* No.4 takes the form of variations on an 18th-century Scottish ballad written, apparently, in preparation for a concert tour in Scotland. It is an attractive work which actually differs little in texture from the standard double-bass-and-piano display pieces. *Melodia* No.2, on the other hand, presents a genuine dialogue between the two instruments both of which contribute, if on less than equal terms, to a



spontaneously, even passionately developed argument of more than usual harmonic interest (the double bass, incidentally, offering the only example of double-stopping on this CD).

As for Nocturne, it allows the piano to anticipate the main theme in the opening section but then gives it no share of the melodic line so expressively introduced and sustained by the double bass. It is, however, the piano which towards the end initiates the change from minor to major harmonies, just before double-bass harmonics magically project the melody into the soprano register.

If Bottesini expected to be remembered by future generations he no doubt felt that it would be through his operas and sacred music. In fact, while they are forgotten, his posthumous reputation derives from an instrumental artistry which, though it died with him, survives in the hands of those few bassists who can do his compositions full justice.

Gerald Larner ©

Sung-Suk Kang Piano

The pianist Sung-Suk Kang presents a unique blend of elegance, sensitivity and determination, resulting from a synthesis of Asian philosophy and European culture.

At the age of five, she had her first piano lesson in Seoul. She received her professional training at The Royal Northern College of Music in England where she studied with Derrick Wyndham, later at the Fachhochschule für Musik in Vienna with Paul Badura-Skoda, as well as in various master classes held by Perlemuter, Kalichstein, Aronovsky, Rogé, and at the Banff Centre for Arts in Alberta, Canada.

In acknowledgement of her artistic talent, Sung-Suk Kang won 1st Prize and the Schumann Prize for best performance at the International Competition in Macugnaga, Italy. On the occasion of commemorating the 200th anniversary of Mozart's death, Sung-Suk Kang was invited to the "Carinthischer Sommer" where she performed a duet with Paul Badura-Skoda. Furthermore, she has opened concert seasons of many different music associations in Europe.

Her concert activities as soloist and chamber musician have taken her to numerous concert halls in Austria, France, England, Italy, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ireland, Korea, Singapore and Canada and she has also been involved in several radio and TV productions for RTE in Ireland, the Austrian ORF and the Italian RAI.

CD productions include recordings as soloist with works by Mozart, Chopin, Brahms, Debussy and Satie; of particular note are performances of piano concertos KV 466 in D-minor and KV 491 in C-minor by W.A. Mozart with the Praha Mozart Orchestra, also the KV 175 piano concerto in D-Major and the Rondo with Variations KV 382 by W.A. Mozart, and the 4th Piano Concerto Op.70 in D-minor by Anton Rubinstein on the MMO label, New York, USA.



The South African-born virtuoso double bassist **Leon Bosch** is one of today's most versatile and imaginative artists. His wide-ranging interests have taken him in many directions, all of which have fed into a unique career and helped to establish his international reputation as an outstanding musician. In addition to a high-profile orchestral life – he is currently principal double bass of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields – he is sought after as a chamber musician, recitalist, concerto soloist, teacher and programmer. In addition he has built up a varied portfolio of commissions and world premieres and is developing a recording catalogue of an unusually diverse repertoire.

Born in Cape Town, though now a British citizen, he graduated from the University of Cape Town before continuing his studies at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, gaining distinction in the Professional Performance Diploma. The recipient of many prizes, he quickly found his vocation. Since 1984, when he made his London solo debut with the Philharmonia Orchestra, he has appeared as a concerto soloist with many distinguished musicians, including Pinchas Zukerman, Sir Charles Groves and Nicholas Kraemer, and as a guest principal and performer with leading orchestras and ensembles.

As an award-winning recitalist he has been invited to play at festivals and music clubs throughout the UK, Europe, Ireland South Africa and the USA. Collaborations are a central part of Leon Bosch's work and highlights of his chamber music partnerships have included engagements with the Lindsay, Belcea and Brodsky String Quartets, The Zukerman Chamber Players, I Musicanti, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble and the Moscow Virtuosi as well as fruitful associations with such pianists as Maria João Pires, Mikhail Rudy, Vladimir Ovchinnikov, Peter Donohoe, Martin Roscoe and, most recently on CD, Sung-Suk Kang.

His innovative approach to music-making and his commitment to the double bass – his enthusiasm for his instrument communicated fluently both from the platform and through teaching, examining and adjudicating – have done much to raise the profile of the instrument. His formidable technique and keen musicianship, combined with his artistic vision, have enabled him to carve a remarkable niche in the musical world.

On the borders of, and beyond, the classical arena Leon Bosch has contributed to recording tracks of such pop artists as Madonna, Robbie Williams, Michael Jackson and Björk while his constantly expanding horizons have led him to explore challenging and little-known music for double bass both in live performance and on disc. He has been responsible for a number of important first performances including *Parallel Shadows* by David Ellis, *Pueblo*, a commission from John McCabe, several works by Allan Stephenson and music by the South African composers Paul Hanmer and Hendrik Hofmeyr.

Complementing his contribution to a clutch of chamber music recordings is a solo discography embracing virtuoso repertoire, albums of British and Russian repertoire and, on forthcoming releases, Hungarian music and works by the brilliant Italian bassist Domenico Dragonetti.

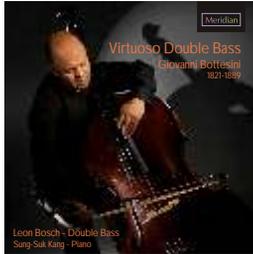
As well as his deep immersion in all aspects of musical life in this country, Leon Bosch is a graduate of the University of Salford in Intelligence and International Relations. He lives on the outskirts of London with his wife and two sons.

Lynne Walker

www.leonbosch.co.uk



Also Available on Meridian



CDE 84544

Virtuoso Double Bass - Giovanni Bottesini 1821-1889 (vol. 1)
Leon Bosch - Double Bass - Sung-Suk Kang - Piano

**Elegy - Tarantella - Romanza Patetica (Mélodie) Gavotta Reverie -
Meditazione (Aria di Bach) Fantasie Sonnambula - Romanza
Drammatica (Elégie)
Adagio par Ernst - Capriccio di Bravura**

Bosch is musically commanding throughout... With the benefit of a warmly resonant recording, these are persuasive performances which carry one along, cocooned in the rich, sonorous tone of Bosch's Gagliano
Robin Stowell. Double Bassist

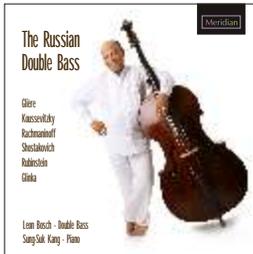


CDE 84550

The British Double Bass
Leon Bosch - Double Bass - Sung-Suk Kang - Piano - I Musicanti

**Lennox Berkeley - Alan Bush - David Ellis
Gordon Jacob - Elisabeth Luyens
Elizabeth Maconchy - John McCabe
Thomas Pitfield
Alfred Reynolds - John Walton**

This CD is a triumphant landmark...with something for everyone and everything thanks to Bosch's supremely eloquent double bass
Peter Dickinson. Gramophone



CDE84564

The Russian Double Bass
Leon Bosch - Double Bass - Sung-Suk Kang - Piano

Works by:-

Glière, Koussevitzky, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, Rubinstein, Glinka

This source invariably produces attractive booklets and provides good, not too over-resonant recorded sound. Mission accomplished on both counts here. Sung-Suk Kang is a most adept partner and Bosch himself proves once again to be in the grand line of Bass virtuosos.

Jonathan Woolf. Music Web International